

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: April 17, 1979

Forwarded to:

Mr. Keating Zeppa
President
International Association of
Drilling Contractors
7400 Harwin, Suite 305
Houston, Texas 77036

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-79-51

About 1100 c.s.t. on April 14, 1976, the self-elevating mobile offshore drilling unit OCEAN EXPRESS departed a drilling site near the Texas coast in the Gulf of Mexico under tow for a new drilling site about 33 nmi northeast. The OCEAN EXPRESS arrived at the new site about 2330, but was not set in place because of adverse seas. Three tugs held the OCEAN EXPRESS in position awaiting better weather, but the seas continued to increase. About 1530 on April 15, one tug became partially disabled because of a reduction gear failure. At 1930, another tug's towline broke. With only one effective tug remaining, the OCEAN EXPRESS turned broadside to the wind and seas, drifted, grounded, capsized, and sank about 2115. The vessel was valued at \$20 million. 1/

The bargemover was rescued by a Coast Guard helicopter. The crew abandoned the OCEAN EXPRESS in the unit's survival capsules. The 14 persons in one capsule were rescued without incident. The other capsule capsized with 20 persons inside; 7 persons escaped and 13 persons drowned.

Since the OCEAN EXPRESS did not have instruments to measure wave heights, the bargemover relied on weather forecasts and visual observations. The bargemover obtained weather forecasts solely from the National Weather Service (NWS) weather radio broadcasts. Comparing the forecasts with the observed conditions, it is evident that the private meteorological service forecasts for Mustang Island lease block A95 on April 14 were more accurate than the general NWS forecasts. The private forecasts indicated that the seas could exceed the OCEAN EXPRESS' jacking limits, but no such indication existed in the NWS forecasts. The NWS marine forecasts are geared toward small craft operators and do not provide specialized information for specific marine operations. The private forecasts presented more information in a more useful format. The Safety Board concludes that private meteorological services should be consulted for the special information needed.

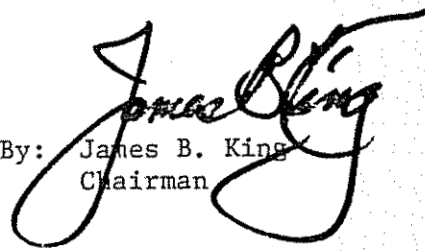
1/ For more detailed information read "Marine Accident Report - Capsizing and Sinking of the Self-Elevating Mobile Offshore Drilling Unit OCEAN EXPRESS near Port O'Connor, Texas, April 15, 1976" (NTSB-MAR-79-5).

As a result of its analysis of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the International Association of Drilling Contractors:

Recommend that its members use private meteorological services which provide the special information needed when engaged in weather-sensitive operations. (Class II, Priority Action)
(M-79-51)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS and HOGUE, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.

By: James B. King
Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James B. King". The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first name "James" and last name "King" clearly legible. It is positioned above the typed name and title.